

Psychical Society Calls Bocock Spirit Pictures a Fraud

Report Made After Inquiry Lasting Six Years

WITHOUT denying that it may be possible to photograph spirits of the departed, the American Society for Psychical Research after six years of investigation has finally concluded that the celebrated Keeler-Lee photographs of the ghost of the late Rev. Mr. Kemper Bocock represent nothing more than crude "trick" photography.

"For those whose brain cells are still capable of faint oscillation," writes Dr. Walter F. Prince, Ph. D., in part two, volume thirteen of the "Proceedings" of the society, "the case is complete."

From a lay point of view the forty-four reproductions of the "spirit photographs" and "spirit writings" of the departed clergyman in the "Proceedings" seem sufficient to convince any one with a bare gleam of intelligence that the case never was anything but a cheap piece of fraud.

The supposed spirit pictures were, for the most part, made by "double exposure," a common trick frequently and legitimately employed by commercial and portrait photographers. But Dr. Prince's report of the fraud also is a double exposure, for in addition to exposing the fraudulent "spook" photographs he exposes the fraudulence of some spirit writing.

To Photograph "Ghosts"

The society became interested back in 1914, when sixteen "spirit" photographs were presented for inspection by Mrs. Marguerite du Pont Lee, a philanthropic woman of means living in Washington, D. C. She is a member of the multimillionaire du Pont family of Delaware. Some of the pictures were likenesses of the Rev. Mr. Kemper Bocock, and Mrs. Lee informed the society that they had been made several years after the death of the reverend gentleman. The investigating officers of the society say they believe Mrs. Lee honestly thought the pictures were actually counterparts of the ghost of her lamented religious instructor, who died in 1904.

Mrs. Lee had been associated with the minister in the conduct of a charitable institution which she has caused to be built. They had many tastes in common and were quite sympathetic with each other.

In an article based on the sixteen "spirit" photographs written by James Hyslop, Ph. D., the secretary of the American Society for Psychical Research and which was published in the proceedings issued in 1915, it was stated:

"He (Mr. Bocock) died a few years ago and apparently gave rise to automatic writing by Mrs. Lee. This automatic writing one day told her she could take photographs." To Mrs. Lee that meant more than the ability to take ordinary photographs; it meant that she had the supernatural power to photograph the souls of the dead—in a word, ghosts.

So Mrs. Lee purchased a camera and began to experiment. After three months of fruitless endeavor, during which she made many photographs of portrait paintings of herself and Mr. Bocock, Mrs. Lee's faith was "rewarded." Balls or disks of white light began to appear mysteriously on her negatives when these were developed. Unaccounted for faces appeared in the pictures.

Many such phenomena occurred and according to the article by Dr. James Hyslop, secretary of the society, published in the "Proceedings" of 1915, they were all of such a character that a Philistine, as Dr. Hyslop calls unbelievers, would attribute to light-struck films, double exposures and reflected lights.

In his supplementary report Dr. Prince says of that first report by his colleague, Dr. Hyslop:

Refused Investigation

"While it did not question the personal good faith of Mrs. Lee and was scrupulous perhaps to excess in setting forth all that could be said in favor of her view of the facts, rendered the Scotch verdict of 'not proven.' Some of the data had an impressive affirmative appearance; others (such as Mr. Keeler's absolute refusal to submit to any expert investigation), pointed in the other direction, but the facts were not then sufficient in quantity or sufficiently under control to permit a positive conclusion."

"Mr. Keeler" was even more important in this case of psychic phenomena than Dr. Bocock's ghost. He is William M. Keeler, now about eighty years old and employed as a photographer by a government bureau in Washington. It was he who took most of the photographs, and, incidentally, he has stated that he took spirit photographs for Professor Robert Hare, who died in 1858.

Mrs. Lee, explaining how she got in touch with Keeler, said that she first wrote to Dr. Hansmann, like-



THE "spirit" of the Rev. Mr. Bocock here appears in an Elizabethan costume. The investigators point out that the spirits appear to have adopted in every detail the costume of a well known period of English history, but in this case a masculine spirit appears in a garb that in this sphere was used exclusively by women.

wise a spirit photographer, of Washington, in 1912. Discussing this individual Dr. Prince says:

"It was Dr. Hansmann, likewise a spirit photographer, of Washington, who induced Mrs. Lee to go to Dr. Keeler. I wrote to Dr. H. in the spring of 1912. He recommended Mr. Keeler, and I wrote to him at once for a sitting. Dr. Hansmann—strange how many of the spirit photographers are 'doctors' of a sort—died in the summer of 1912, and it was probably his failing health that caused him to pass over a promising customer. It was this Hansmann of whom Dr. Richard Hodgson wrote to Mr. P. E. W., on December 13, 1899. Hansmann certainly, some years ago, apparently had a great deal to do with fraudulent mediums, notably the Keelers."

Four Groups

The photographs offered by Mrs. Lee were classified in four groups by Dr. Prince, as follows:

(1) Impersonal and apparently unresponsive pictures marked in some part by large light disk, or presenting the exact appearance of having resulted from double or triple exposure, or showing various dark spots, curves and bands. The photographs showing only spots, curves and bands were, however, not produced by a camera, but by tying the plates, inclosed in a black paper and an opaque envelope, to Mrs. Lee's forehead and keeping them there for an hour.

(2) Photographs representing some scene or object devoid of anomalies, except that it is declared not to have been before the camera.

(3) Photographs of human faces and figures among which the features of the late Rev. Kemper Bocock are most commonly recognizable. Often the pictures appear in some setting of people or natural objects.

(4) Photographs of script, supposed to be directly produced upon

the sensitive plates by Mr. Bocock and other spirits and conveying declarations regarding the photographs, mainly of group 3, and other matters of interest.

All told, Dr. Prince examined about 4,000 of the supposed spirit prints. He learned that the agency of Mrs. Lee was most frequently independent in the production of group one of the photographs. Classes 3 and 4, he learned, seemed never to have been wholly clear of connection with Keeler.

In that connection Dr. Prince writes:

"Mrs. Lee was quite confident that she both took and developed a few of the plates which proved to bear mysterious portraits, without Dr. Keeler's hand having touched them, but she did not claim to have done both unless she was at least in his house and personal vicinity at the stage when the pictures were taken or developed, or both."

Still Making Them

Dr. Prince writes that the photographic material in the case progressed in a steady stream—Keeler is still making them—and day after day the investigator spent going over them with a magnifying glass. This was done, of course, with the sanction of Mrs. Lee, whose attitude toward his efforts is described by Dr. Prince as follows:

"Mrs. Lee was the very soul of candor, was ready to answer any question, manifested no Eve-like curiosity about the voluminous notes taken, and with evident, if somewhat confident sincerity, declared her wish that some one would really attempt to demonstrate the hypothesis of fraud. Whomever else the evidence may attain of fraud, however, everything in the case exempts Mrs. Lee."

On the word of Mrs. Lee and a brother of the dead clergyman Dr. Prince learned that there existed

only two photographs of the Rev. Mr. Bocock made during his lifetime. In both of these the subject was photographed while seated and showed only his head and chest.

Always the Same Angle

"The most astonishing thing about the alleged spirit photographs of Mr. Bocock up to the report of 1914," writes Dr. Prince, "is that the face was always at the same angle to the beholder. It might be looking a little to the left or a little to the right, but it was at the same angle, reversing like one's face in a mirror. In the report (Dr. Hyslop's) are sixteen Bocock photographs and all maintain the exact angle, which I may call one-third right or one-third left, meaning approximately one-third the distance from squarely to the front to the right profile or left profile."

To prove that this was a suspicious circumstance the investigator took thirty-two photographs of men from magazines in the order in which he found them. The facial angles were almost as varied as the photographs, except that six were full face.

But in the sixteen Bocock's pictures published in 1915 the face stares at the beholder from precisely the same angle, right or left.

"I have been unable to find facial differences," writes Dr. Prince, "which could not be accounted for in the following ways: (a) Reversing. (b) Photographing larger or smaller. (c) Various tilting the head to accord with the position of the trunk. If one will make an oval opening in a sheet of paper and place it over any Bocock picture in such a way that the head appears erect in the opening, while the rest of the picture is covered, he will appreciate the force of this point. (d) Paring away the edge of the hair on top or on the side, or even a portion of the ear or the cheek. (e) Photographing or printing darker or lighter. (f) Retouching, either by way of removing something, as the glasses, and, incidentally, in

his features show no appropriate rapture, while his calm gaze passes her utterly."

Well, as Dr. Prince says, even Mrs. Lee concedes "a certain degree of dependence" upon the life photographs, and he adds that it is suggested that Bocock thinks about one or the other of these two photographs, and that this affects the spirit photographs.

Another feature of the spirit photographs that Dr. Prince considered curious was that while the face was invariably photographed at the same angle no such limitations affected the hands, which are found photographed in almost every position.

"Strange," ponders Dr. Prince, "that spirit agencies, which can photograph hands clasped, hands in pockets, hands extended, hands gesticulating, hands playing the violin or piano, hands guiding in the mazes of the dance, hands with fingers outspread, hands clenched, hands in every conceivable position should not be able to turn the chin one inch from its position in one or other of the life photographs, or to part the lips in the slightest in thousands of pictures."

"Nor is the clothing which Mr. Bocock wears in the photograph of alleged spirit origin limited by his memory of the two taken on this side of the veil. Indeed, if the object were studiously to avoid resemblance, the success could hardly be greater."

An Extensive Wardrobe

"If all the clothes shown represent memories of clothes formerly worn by him, Mr. Bocock had certainly maintained an extensive and versatile wardrobe. But this is not the case—for example, we find him in a spirit of George Washington's regimentals, with every fold exactly as it is in a well known picture of the Father of His Country. Mrs. Lee admits this and herself called attention to the fact, which she considered quite remarkable! In this



THIS picture, supposed to be a spirit photograph, really puzzled the investigators for a time, but eventually they discovered that the woman's figure was the reproduction of a cover design of The Cosmopolitan Magazine for October, 1895

by the nicely balanced shadows within the folds. But at the exact point where her chin begins, it comes from her left, so that the left side of her collar is in the shadow, while the left of her chin and face is in the full light. The light strikes the man's head, close by, from another direction, somewhat to the right and above the couple.

"Of course this thing would follow now and then," concluded Dr.

of optics there are other interesting features. For example, Dr. Prince writes:

Up to Date Dances

"I am informed that the dance is one introduced since Bocock's death, and as this represents what is claimed really happened, Paradise must keep posted and take a lively interest in the fads on earth. The gown is a bit youthful for the lady, and the head a trifle hypertrophic for the gentleman, but gowns and maybe heads are a matter of taste."

Dr. Prince notes also that among more than twenty-five "astrals" of Mrs. Lee she is doing all sorts of things, but with every facial muscle in the same position and the cupid's bow shadow in every one. The investigator says:

"I will simply add that I have a photograph of Mrs. Lee—not claimed to be an astral one—which is the original from which the others got their heads, unless there were twenty-five separate miracles."

Once the spirits made a ludicrous error, and caused Mr. Bocock's head to appear in female Elizabethan garb. Besides that a portion of the original woman's head is left showing over the Bocock head.

In some instances either the spirits or photographer Keeler or the Rev. Mr. Bocock grew very careless. "There were cases," writes Dr. Prince, "where the superimposing of the paper figure was so gross and undisguised that I involuntarily attempted to pick the edge with my nail. In one the feet had come loose and rolled up over the edge of the pantaloons and were so photographed—a curl of white paper—with no detriment to faith."

Poor Photography

Another crudity was the use of an engraving—revealed by the contact dots left by the corroding acid—with photograph heads of Bocock



THIS is not a spirit photograph, with the shade of the Rev. Mr. Bocock and another spirit mingled with the folds of the flag, but is a faked picture made by the American Society for Psychical Research as a demonstration of what can be done with a camera

some cases a part of the eyes, or adding something as by way of altering the hairline on the temples or lengthening the mustache. (g) Making the head unnaturally long and narrow, as can be done by photographing a portrait in a slanting position, and by other processes.

All Identical

"Except for such minor divergences, which could be produced as described, the faces throughout the whole big series are identical with those in the two known life photographs. Thousands of photographs of Mr. Bocock and not one of them with face turned square to the front exactly in profile or turned two-thirds away in either direction. Thousands, and whether he stands amid the wonders of Yosemite, or sits at ease in some luxurious apartment, or addresses an audience with uplifted hand, or plays a violin, or dances a dance invented on earth since his departure, or endeavors to plant a kiss on the lips of his fair partner—but with evident danger to her ear—in all he is resolved to preserve one or the other of two facial angles, exact to the fraction of an inch; in all he maintains that 'keep-just-so-and-look-pleasant' expression of the photographic studio; he smiles not, exults not, wonders not, grieves not, nor ever once opens his lips, but is as if fixed in the calm of Buddha forever. In short he seems condemned to maintain the expression of his two life-photos as well as their angles of position. In one photograph he is addressing an audience with book in hand, but his lips are closed and his face is looking calmly over his right shoulder at us. In others he is disclosed near water falls, on giant crags, but he is not looking at or betraying any interest in them. In another his arms encircle a lady most convincingly, but

and similar cases his memory of his own garments seems to have become mixed with memories of other people's garments. And there are other pictures that the memory theory will not touch at all, if the messages that come with them are to be trusted. One of them shows Mr. Bocock in Episcopal robes, for the script (photographed "spirit" writing) says he has become a bishop. (He hadn't acquired that ecclesiastical rank when he died.)

"They indeed look like memories, since they have the orthodox American cut, but they are said to be what he now wears on the other side."

A Changeable Body

"Nor is the body that fills the clothes limited by memories of life photographs. And this is most curious, for, though we should have expected that in showing himself as he now is, the newly elected prelate could by dint of special effort bring his chin about the fraction of an inch or raise his eyes a mere trifle. On the other hand we should have expected a certain stability in, say, his measurements. But not so, sometimes he is shown tall and thin, sometimes thick and short, sometimes betwixt and between. Here his hands are small and slender, there large and muscular. Often the head is disproportioned to the trunk. The neck may be reasonably long or short."

The laws of optics in the spirit world evidently differ from those which operate here, Dr. Prince facetiously decides after finding among the spirit photographs, prints one showing Mrs. Lee's astral body engaged in a dance with a Bocock head with a Vernon Castle body, and which picture is lighted from three directions. On the woman's gown light falls from the front as shown

Photos Created a Sensation When Made Public

and Mrs. Lee. The dots were not visible in the heads.

"At first view," writes Dr. Prince, "about the most convincing photograph among those of which the society possesses copies is that represented in Plate 25. Of none was more confidence expressed that it was taken and developed under test conditions, but no attempt was made to identify figures. Alas, it is an exact copy of the frontispiece in 'The Cosmopolitan Magazine' for October, 1895, except that it is reversed and a little is pared away from the left side of the bottom. The original was drawn by José Cabrinety as an illustration for a prose poem entitled 'The Pursuit of Happiness.' If a spirit produced that picture because it made a strong impression upon him when he was on earth then he certainly has a great memory for details. I can barely conceive of a spirit taking a photograph, somehow, of a magazine illustration, though I would expect him, if a bishop, to tell the truth about it. But it is much easier for me to conceive of somebody on this side who has a not too inquiring client passing it off for what it is not."

In notes on his report Dr. Prince reveals some of the information supplied him concerning the circumstances attending the "taking" of this spirit photograph. Mrs. Lee wrote him as follows:

Mrs. Lee's Records

"I am glad to have an exact record as to how the photo to which you refer was obtained. I copy from the album in which the print is pasted: 'May 14, 1914. Plates inclosed in opaque envelopes by R. S. Baker, 1322 F Street. Taken by me to Dr. Keeler's, 1339 Otis Street, at night. Held in hands by Dr. K. and myself until three raps were heard. Developed at once. Plates never left my hands for the fraction of a second. Developed by me, Dr. K. at a distance from developer.' This letter was written to Dr. Prince by Mrs. Lee February 24, 1919, which would indicate that at a fairly recent date she was still confident that the pictures had been made supernaturally."

In showing how some other pictures were supposed to have been taken and developed Dr. Prince quotes an inscription written by Mrs. Lee on the fly leaf of an album of 200 of the photographs:

"Photos taken by Dr. William M. Keeler Sunday mornings with Century camera. Some photos taken by focusing camera on black curtain. Exposure about half a minute. Developed by Dr. Keeler, often M. du Pont Lee present."

Balks at Witne

"A fact whose significance it is difficult to escape," according to Dr. Prince, "is that Dr. Keeler will under no circumstances allow a person to be present during the photographing or developing who represents the Society for Psychical Research or who is not entirely satisfactory to him."

Dr. Prince says that Keeler's aversion to anything that savors of expert examination is of long standing.

In his relations with Mrs. Lee, Keeler frequently produced spirit photographs of script which purported to be messages from the Rev. Dr. Bocock. Mrs. Lee and the departed minister had many "communications" with each other by this means, usually concerning the photographs.

A plate would be developed and lo and behold, there would be a message from Bocock himself.

Concerning these spirit writings, Dr. Prince's report contains a copy of a letter from Albert S. Osborn, a handwriting expert, of 233 Broadway, and enlarged photographs comparing Keeler's handwriting with that there were by the same hand, writing expert's letter follows:

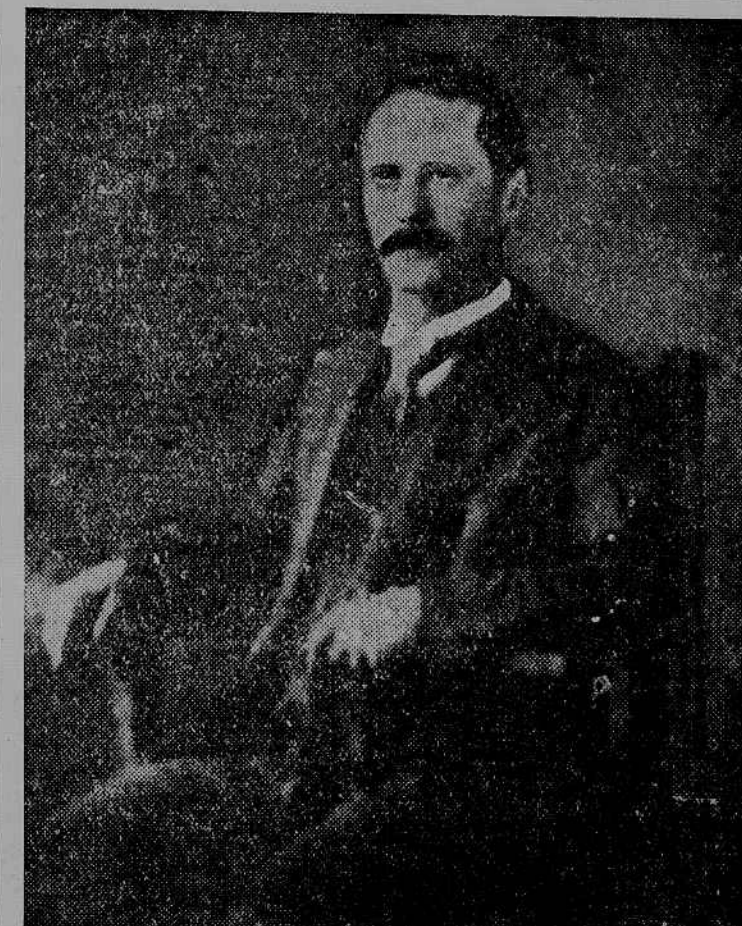
"I have examined numerous alleged spirit writings which it is alleged came from spirits through one W. M. Keeler and have compared these writings with a letter signed 'W. M. Keeler' and an accompanying envelope and in my opinion the writer of this letter and envelope and the writer of the various alleged spirit writings purporting to come from Socrates, Abraham Lincoln, Phillips Brooks, Henry Ward Beecher, are one and the same person."

Similar tests were applied to Keeler's writings in comparison with the supposed messages from Bocock. All the evidence indicated that they were by the same hand and that hand Keeler's.

But, as Dr. Prince says, there still are people who will continue to have faith in the spirit photos of the Rev. Mr. Bocock, but that does not surprise Dr. Prince, because, he says, there are credulous people who insist that Houdini accomplishes his sensational "escapes" by supernatural means in the face of his oft repeated statements that he does it all by main strength and mechanical contrivances.



SPIRIT land apparently keeps right up to date on the latest dances. At the time the Rev. Mr. Bocock died, this dance had not yet come into vogue, but his "spirit" is here seen in a pose suggestive of Mr. and Mrs. Castle



THIS is the real Rev. Mr. Kemper Bocock, who died in 1904. In every case in which his spirit is supposed to have been photographed by William H. Keeler his head is held at exactly the same angle as in this authentic photograph